

Arts in Education

BENEFITS OF THE ARTS IN LEARNING

Educating the workforce for the creative economy requires the creative thinking skills basic to the arts. Educational experiences in the arts provide knowledge and skills critical to student success, both in more general academic contexts and in subsequent careers. Arts in education programs involve strong partnerships among school and community organizations and the advocacy of parents and community members. Educational institutions also preserve, transmit, and translate the community culture. Community organizations, especially arts groups, provide educational arts programming for students and the public.

Skills developed through exposure to the arts in education include ability to understand complex issues and emotions, leadership, higher order thinking skills, originality, elaboration, and flexibility. Many attributes of creative thinkers are fundamental to successful participation in a rapidly evolving global economy. The competitive advantage of the future, whether for individuals, companies, or countries, will be the ability to engage in “right brain thinking”—to bring creativity to the task at hand whether one is working in manufacturing, services, or the arts. In many industries, this creativity means not just generally thinking creatively, but applying aesthetic distinctiveness or uniqueness to whatever product or service the industry sells. The ability to engage in aesthetic creativity is one that is most effectively taught starting from a young age and consistently throughout the educational years, and by engaging the students hands-on in artistic and creative disciplines.

Innovative education programs in North Carolina rely on the arts to engage students and build life skills.



JAM, Trevor Stuart, Haywood County



Seesaw Studio, Durham. Photo: Jim Lee

JUNIOR APPALACHIAN MUSICIANS (JAM)

In 2000, Alleghany County guidance counselor and musician Helen White found a way to provide quality after school programs for children and help preserve community traditions. She created the JAM (Junior Appalachian Musicians) after school program, matching local old-time musicians with elementary school students. Fiddles and banjos, once an integral part of family and community entertainment, were being set aside for other leisure time pursuits. Through JAM the traditions are being passed on and the music is kept alive. Today there are over a dozen programs throughout North Carolina keeping the music alive through JAM and its companion program TAPS (Traditional Artists Program in the Schools).

SEESAW STUDIO

SeeSaw is a design studio in Durham where teen artists learn that art can be a business. Modeled on YA/YA (Young Aspirations/Young Artists), a nationally known after school program in New Orleans, SeeSaw gives young people the opportunity to develop from entry level to apprentice to senior designer. Youth between the ages of 13 and 21 work independently and cooperatively to create art that is marketable. Some projects, such as pillows, handmade journals, hats and handbags, get sold after they're made. Other projects are special commissions. The students and the community learn that art can be a tool for building workforce skills.

“The artistic process nurtures people like us who thrive on creating. Beginning with an idea that is brought to life through techniques new and old, it is only truly completed through connecting with our customers, and understanding their responses to our work.”

BEN AND KATHRYN STEWART
SILVER BONSAI GALLERY
MANTEO



Photo: David Potorti

Artists Ben Stewart and Kathryn Holton were originally headed for degrees in illustration when they discovered a mutual interest in jewelry making. Graduating from Savannah College of Art & Design in 1995 with BFA degrees in Metals and Jewelry, they eventually married and opened Silver Bonsai Gallery in Manteo. Influenced by Art Nouveau design, Japanese woodblock printing, and architectural elements, they apply many techniques found in turn-of-the-century jewelry to their contemporary custom designs. Guided by the principle that “form follows function,” they are constantly challenged by their customers to grow in new directions, mastering new techniques and practicing established ones. Today, their gallery also displays original art in a variety of media from 30 other artists, as well as the “living art” of more than 500 bonsai trees.